

VOGUE

The Unbelievably Gorgeous Italian Wine Region You Haven't Heard of Yet

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Trieste city harbor in Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Italy.

Photo: Alamy

A little more than an hour outside of Venice, Italy harbors a secret gem of a culinary melting pot. Bordered by Slovenia and Austria, Friuli-Venezia Giulia is nestled in the northeastern corner of Italy and boasts some of the country's finest gastronomic artisans.

Lush landscapes, quaint villages, and snow-capped mountains provide the perfect background for a long weekend of eating and drinking, Friulian style. American tourists are few and far between, so—as with most off-the-beaten-path destinations—it's helpful to travel with an insider for an authentic experience.

Chrystal Clifton, co-owner of Palmina Wines has spent the past 20 years getting to know the local purveyors and winemakers of Friuli, as her winery works with Italian grape varieties on California's Central Coast. This year, Clifton launched a bespoke touring service to give gourmands a VIP taste of the region. Here, some insights garnered from Clifton on a recent road trip around the region:



The Fiat in the vineyards

Photo: Courtesy of Michelle Lyn

How to Get Around

Fly into Venice and rent a car at the airport. Go for the true Italian experience and get a teeny tiny Fiat, guaranteed to handle all those roundabouts like a boss. GPS is key since Friuli still flies under the radar and street signs are elusive. Keep an eye out for the Autogrill stops along the highway, where you can get everything from espresso to peppered slabs of prosciutto. Also be sure to grab some pocket coffee: chocolate-covered espresso candies necessary for any Italian road trip.



Palmanova's bookstore

Photo: Courtesy of Michelle Lyn

See the Stars

Make the fortified town of Palmanova your first stop. Built during the Renaissance, it is a concentric city built in the shape of a star with nine points. Head to the plaza in the center of town and have coffee at Caffetteria Torinese, then pop into the picturesque bookstore next door. Just off the main drag, Nonna Pallina is a decadent pastry shop that dishes out truffles embossed with Palmanova's emblematic star. Make your way to the outer walls and marvel at the geometric symmetry designed with utopian ideals in mind.



Antipasti at La Frasca

Indulge in a Long Lunch

Moving on, stop for a 12-course lunch at roadside taverna La Frasca, paired

with owner Valter Scarbolo's wines. Scarbolo and his wife, Maria Grazia, provide a warm welcome to local cuisine, serving traditional dishes like tagliolini al San Daniele and grilled venison with currant jam. Next, head to the town of Udine, where you can climb the hill to the castle built in the historical city center. Visit the museum within the castle and then descend into the principal square, Piazza della Libertà, for an afternoon spritz at Caffè Contarena in the center of town.



La Subida barn suite

Photo: Courtesy of Michelle Lyn

Venture Into Nature

Embrace nature and check into La Subida, the luxe and cozy eco-property owned and operated by the Sirk family in the hills of Cormons. Let the energetic patriarch Josko Sirk give you a tour of his vinegar house, the “nest”—a secluded treehouse experience like no other—and the barn converted into a rustic bedroom. Dine in the family’s humble Michelin-starred restaurant Trattoria Al Cacciatore della Subida which features a cultural mashup of dishes common to Friuli. Starters might include house-made deer pâté with creamy polenta sauce or a rustic cabbage soup paired with Friulian or Slovenian wines.



Venica & Venica’s wine cellar

Photo: Courtesy of Michelle Lyn

Tour & Taste

Go behind the scenes with some of the region's most notable gastronomic artisans, all of whom are part of a tight-knit community. The D'Oswaldo family has been producing prosciutto at their estate since 1940 and the young member, Andrea, proudly shares the curing and smoking techniques that were started by his grandfather and preserved over multiple generations. A few kilometers away, the Zoff family is producing quality cheeses from their farm that boasts organically raised, grass-fed red-spotted cows. A peek into the cheese storage room offers a colorful look and insightful lesson on why moldy cheese is a good thing. Make your way to Venica & Venica where you can taste wines from one of Friuli's most famous winemaking families. The sprawling estate also boasts rooms for rent so you can drink a whole bottle of their malvasia bianca and call it a night.



Cividale del Friuli

Photo: Courtesy of Michelle Lyn

Wine & Unwind

End your foodie-fueled adventure in Cividale del Friuli with a stay at Orsone, the boutique B&B owned by New York-born restaurateur Joe Bastianich and his mother Lidia. Enjoy a five-star fireside dinner in the cozy dining room and wake up to a delicious breakfast spread that includes an almond ricotta tart you

will desperately want to try to re-create once you get home. Tour the town full of medieval architecture and let yourself wander down alleys where boisterous vendors hawk frico, a decadent local delicacy that includes fried Montasio cheese (enough said). And finally, spend the last of your days sipping ribolla gialla and Vespa Rosso at the Bastianich winery, where you can decide whether or not you want to let the cat out of the bag about your new favorite destination in Italy.